

## CHRIST ON THE LYRE-BACKED THRONE\*

JAMES D. BRECKENRIDGE

ONE of the most familiar, yet most debated, images in all Byzantine art is the mosaic in the narthex lunette of the church of Hagia Sophia which depicts the enthroned Christ adored by a prostrate emperor.<sup>1</sup> The most recent contribution to the debate has been made in an earlier volume of these *Papers*.<sup>2</sup> While some fifty years' discussion has clarified a great deal about the mosaic—its subject, and its date; and Oikonomides in particular has explained a number of the puzzling aspects of the picture, including some which had not theretofore been recognized as problematic—some basic questions remain unresolved. This essay cannot hope to solve all of them, much less end the debate; but I believe that I can eliminate some remaining uncertainties through the use of evidence which has too often been either ignored or misused.

The mosaic depicts Christ, bearded, robed, and nimbate, seated on a high and broad-backed throne, with His feet on a footstool (fig. 1). He gestures with His right hand, while His left holds an open codex. To His right is a figure in imperial dress, bowing prostrate in adoration, his bearded head also encircled by a nimbus. On either side of the jeweled throne are roundels containing busts, with hands visible, of the Virgin Mary (to her Son's right) and an

angel.<sup>3</sup> The figure of Christ is about twice life-size, and the others are in proportion. Examination of the image shows that adjustments have been made in scale and proportion to allow for the sharp angle from which the mosaic is viewed by the spectator below.<sup>4</sup>

Whittemore, when first publishing the mosaic, described the throne in detail, and gave his conclusion that it represents an actual imperial throne, but he nowhere used the term "lyre-backed" with which it has since become associated. This had already been done by Weigand,<sup>5</sup> however, and the term caught hold immediately. Yet there does not appear, on the surface at least, any necessary connection between the lyre shape and the actual musical instrument. Such a link has now been hypothesized, however, by Anthony Cutler in a recent study which places great emphasis on exact details of the throne back and its components.<sup>6</sup> Cutler's thesis is that the throne of this shape derived from pre-Christian images of Orpheus taming the beasts with his music. Its significance would therefore lie in the implication of universal harmony, now under the dominion of Christ.

The location of the mosaic over the central door into the sanctuary, in relation to the rituals of the Great Church, as well as its magnificent imagery and quality of execution place it in-

\* The help and encouragement of Professor Kurt Weitzmann were essential to the completion of this paper; his suggestions and comments added significantly to its documentation, and persuaded me of the validity of what seemed at times a redundant effort. David Wright has kindly guided me around some of the traps in the chronology of early Italian church decoration, and has helped generously in other ways. To these and to many other friends, colleagues, and students who have assisted in the formation of the thesis stated here, I express my sincere and profound gratitude.

<sup>1</sup> Published by T. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul. Preliminary Report on the First Year's Work, 1931–1932. The Mosaics of the Narthex* (Oxford, 1933).

<sup>2</sup> N. Oikonomides, "Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia," *DOP*, 30 (1976), 151–72.

<sup>3</sup> On one point I differ with Oikonomides: his "gloomy Angel" (*ibid.*, 154 and *passim*) is no more than a conventional type interpreted subjectively in terms of the specific angel presumably depicted. I find no significant difference in expression between this angel in one roundel and the "sulky-looking" Virgin in the other. (Perhaps both are depressed at the meager prospects of absolution for the errant emperor below?)

<sup>4</sup> Whittemore, *op. cit.*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> E. Weigand, "Zum Denkmälerkreis des Christogrammimbus," *BZ*, 32 (1932), 63–81, esp. 67–69.

<sup>6</sup> A. Cutler, *Transfigurations: Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography* (University Park, Pa., 1975) (hereafter Cutler, *Transfigurations*), 5–52. See *infra*, p. 252.

contestably within the ambience of the Macedonian imperial house. More exact dating, however, must depend on identification of the suppliant emperor, and this has proven a more difficult task than the first commentators imagined.<sup>7</sup> The present situation remains something of a standoff, with majority opinion favoring Leo VI (886–912), while an obdurate minority advances sound reasons for preferring his predecessor, Basil I (867–886).<sup>8</sup> Most recently, however, two authorities have, for different reasons, suggested a third possible date, in the reign of Leo's son, Constantine VII (913–959).<sup>9</sup>

Comparative iconographic material is surprisingly limited. Christ is shown on a "lyre-backed" throne in only one manuscript of the period, in two miniatures of the most important surviving manuscript associated with the court of Basil I, that of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus now in Paris.<sup>10</sup> While the first, in the frontispiece, is badly rubbed and heavily redrawn (fig. 2),<sup>11</sup> and hence difficult to decipher as to its original conformation, the depiction of the Vision of Isaiah on a later page (fig. 3)<sup>12</sup> includes a throne which is better preserved and unquestionably similar to that of the Hagia Sophia mosaic, with minor discrepancies in details of the throne, the gesture of Christ's right hand, and the form of His head.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The seriousness of the problem was recognized by T. Whittemore, "The Narthex Mosaic of Sancta Sophia," *Atti del V Congresso internazionale di Studi bizantini*, II (1940), 214–23, esp. 214–17.

<sup>8</sup> Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 5 note 2, updates the bibliography while prudently avoiding the question himself. The only recent statement of opinion prior to Oikonomides' is that of P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* (hereafter Grierson, *DOC Coins*), III: *Leo III to Nicephorus III, 717–1081* (Washington, D.C., 1973), 156f., citing in turn C. Mango, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul*, DOS, VIII (Washington, D.C., 1962), 96f., as authority that "there is no decisive evidence either way."

<sup>9</sup> Grierson, *loc. cit.*; Oikonomides, *op. cit.*, 171f.

<sup>10</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, MS grec 510: H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VI<sup>e</sup> au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1929), pls. xv–lx bis; cf. S. Der Nersessian, "The Illustrations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus: Paris Gr. 510. A Study of the Connections between Text and Images," *DOP*, 16 (1962), 195–228.

<sup>11</sup> Fol. Av: Omont, *op. cit.*, pl. xv.

<sup>12</sup> Fol. 67v: *ibid.*, pl. xxv.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 20–22.

The only depiction in monumental art of Christ on a lyre-backed throne surviving from the period prior to the ninth century is the mosaic at the eastern end of the south wall of the nave of S. Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna, where the procession of male saints culminates in a group of the enthroned Christ flanked by angel attendants (fig. 4).<sup>14</sup> While Christ's left half, together with the neighboring angel, is entirely modern, His other half—toward the apse—derives from the original decoration of what was then Theodoric's palace chapel, ca. A.D. 500.<sup>15</sup> The back of the surviving half of the throne is unmistakably curved, although the upright tapers toward the top in a way not found in the later examples.<sup>16</sup>

This meager list comprises all extant examples of the portrayal of Christ on a curve-backed throne in Byzantine art down to the middle of the tenth century, except for the coins. These supply an equally concentrated group of examples, confined to less than a century during the Macedonian period. All occur on gold issues from the reigns of Basil I, Leo VI, Alexander, and Constantine VII (with and without other colleagues), between the 860's and the 950's A.D.<sup>17</sup> Such concentration seems to confirm other evidence that the image had particular significance for the Macedonian house. When it was revived in the eleventh century by Constantine IX (1042–55) and X (1059–67), it clearly alluded to past associations and glories.<sup>18</sup>

While Grierson perceived all these coin types as comprising variations of one basic type, he divided this into four subtypes, as have other

<sup>14</sup> Cf. G. Steigerwald, "Christus als Pantokrator in der untersten Zone der Langhausmosaik von S. Apollinare Nuovo zu Ravenna," *Tortulae: Studien zu altchristlichen und byzantinischen Monumenten* (Freiburg, 1966), 272–84.

<sup>15</sup> The drawing in W. Deichmann, *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes*, I: *Geschichte und Monamente* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 173, indicates the dividing line between the original mosaic and the restoration; see the discussion of chronology, *ibid.*, 171–76.

<sup>16</sup> The drawing cited *supra*, note 15, indicates the tradition that the lost left hand of Christ originally held a book inscribed EGO SUM REX GLORIAE; this seems to obviate the speculation on the nature of the implement in Christ's left hand: Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 152, 154–58.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 157f.

commentators. Grierson's obverse subtypes are defined as follows:

- Ia (fig. 7): Seated Christ, right arm extended, on a simple lyre-backed throne. Solidi of Basil I and Constantine VII.<sup>19</sup>
- Ib (fig. 8): Seated Christ, right arm in sling of cloak, hand outward, on decorated throne. Solidi of Leo VI.<sup>20</sup>
- Ic (fig. 9): Seated Christ, right arm extended, on decorated throne. Solidi of Alexander.<sup>21</sup>
- Id (fig. 10): Seated Christ, right arm in sling of cloak, hand inward. Solidi of Romanus I and Constantine VII, histamenoi of Constantine IX and X.<sup>22</sup>

The economy of Grierson's distinctions is notable: he discriminates almost entirely on the basis of Christ's gestures, while specifics of other details are not developed beyond very rudimentary levels ("throne decorated..."). Nevertheless, his groupings coincide closely with those already established by Bellinger, who appears to have been the first to appreciate the nature and significance of the problem: that the form of the throne back changes from issue to issue, with no progression or sign of purpose.<sup>23</sup> If we accept the widely held thesis that these types were modeled on one or more icons of the period, we are faced with the question of just what these were, and even how many there may have been.<sup>24</sup>

Aside from these images of Christ Himself, a number of depictions survive of the Virgin and Child seated on a lyre-backed throne. There are in fact more examples of this image from the preiconoclastic period than there are of Christ.<sup>25</sup> None of these have known Constantinopolitan provenance, as do the Christ images of Hagia Sophia and the coins; but two or three of the four that have survived were created in situations where the influence of the capital was pre-

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> A. R. Bellinger, "Byzantine Notes. 6. The Coins of Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His Associates," *ANSMN*, 13 (1967), 148–65, esp. 152f. Cf. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 6f., 10ff.

<sup>24</sup> On the question of sources of numismatic types in the "major" arts, cf. *infra*, p. 254f.

<sup>25</sup> Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 10–16.

minent, so that they cannot be considered of wholly provincial character.

Probably the most significant of these images is on a layer of plaster on the famous "palimpsest wall" at S. Maria Antiqua in Rome, of which just enough survives to establish that the original picture consisted of a frontal Virgin and Child seated on a throne with the familiar double-curved, bejeweled frame for a back (fig. 6); the pair are flanked by angels offering homage.<sup>26</sup> While the exact date of execution of this level of the murals in S. Maria Antiqua is far from precisely fixed—even the sequence of levels is still debated—it can safely be regarded as beneath, and hence earlier than, the level with a frieze of saints that was part of the scheme of decoration executed for Pope John VII (705–707).<sup>27</sup> According to Kitzinger, it also underlies the classicizing Annunciation scene, and should be dated to the sixth century.<sup>28</sup>

Cutler's contention that this image was based on that of Christ enthroned in S. Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna (fig. 4)<sup>29</sup> seems less than fully persuasive in view of the distribution of other examples well outside any conceivable orbit of Ravennate (or Roman) influence. Most similar is a mosaic, now lost, at St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki, destroyed in the fire of 1917, which depicted the enthroned Virgin and Child flanked

<sup>26</sup> P. Romanelli and P. J. Nordhagen, *S. Maria Antiqua* (Rome, 1964), fig. 3 (p. 33) and pl. 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 1; for more extensive discussion, see P. J. Nordhagen, "The Earliest Decorations in S. Maria Antiqua and Their Date," *Acta IRNORV*, 1 (1962), 53–72. This superimposition in the early eighth century makes incomprehensible (at least without further explanation) Cutler's assertion (*Transfigurations*, 30f.) that this fresco of the enthroned Virgin served as a model for the apsidal mosaic in the successor church of S. Maria Nova (now S. Francesca Romana) in the thirteenth century. As far as I am aware, the disintegration of the upper layers of paint and plaster on the presbytery walls of S. Maria Antiqua is a recent phenomenon which began only after the church was abandoned, and most especially since its exposure at the beginning of the present century. The sixth-century Virgin and Child must have been completely invisible when the thirteenth-century mosaic was made.

<sup>28</sup> E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making. Main Lines of Stylistic Development in Mediterranean Art 3rd–7th Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 114. David Wright informs me that he endorses this chronology, which is at variance with that of Nordhagen, *loc. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> *Transfigurations*, 15.

by angels and two attendant saints, Demetrius (with a donor) and Theodore (?).<sup>30</sup> Like most of the lost work in S. Demetrios, this mosaic has generally been dated between the late sixth and the mid-seventh centuries.<sup>31</sup>

An only slightly less damaged mosaic with the same theme is in the apse of the Panagia Kanakaria near Lythrakomi in Cyprus, dated to the Justinianic or a somewhat later period and considered to reflect Constantinopolitan influence.<sup>32</sup> Its scheme is more formal than in the other examples, and a mandorla frames the seated Mother and Child.

The final example is still more problematic as to date and provenance, although physically it is far better preserved. This is the silver lid of a reliquary box in the cathedral treasury at Grado (fig. 5), whose date is disputed between the fifth and the following two centuries.<sup>33</sup> The form of the throne back of this image is clearly different from that of the enthroned Christ: the uprights, which take the cabriole form, taper from bottom to top, suggesting (as Cutler remarks) the horns of an animal, in this unique case striated spirally to emphasize the resemblance.<sup>34</sup>

Comparing the thrones in these four images as best we may, we note not only this consistent taper, but also the fact that the crossbar connecting the uprights is, in all examples where it is visible, decidedly thinner than the vertical members; this is another distinction from the thrones of Christ. For this reason alone, we must question Cutler's hypothesis that the image of the Virgin and Child on a "lyre-backed" throne is an adaptation of the image of Christ on the same sort of seat.

There is one more group of images depicting the lyre-backed throne. These show emperors

seated on thrones of this type on coins which date between the fifth century and the end of the ninth. It is on the incidence of these types, particularly those dating from the fifth and sixth centuries, that the meaning of the throne as a seat for Christ (with and without the Virgin) has been sought by most students of the subject.<sup>35</sup>

A throne back with outward-curving uprights first appears on solidi of Leo I and II (fig. 11), dating from the brief period in 473–474 when the aging Emperor Leo I adopted the son of Zeno as his co-Augustus.<sup>36</sup> When, after the death of Leo I in 474, Zeno in turn joined his son on the throne, the event was recorded on a new type, where the throne has a square back (fig. 12).<sup>37</sup> The throne with the lyre-backed form appears next on solidi of 527, during another period of adoptive rulership, on issues of Justin I and his nephew Justinian (fig. 13).<sup>38</sup> Again, as Cutler notes, alternate types of throne, with rectilinear backs and even with no backs at all, are to be found supporting the same pair of rulers.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–11, 20–22; cf., e.g., Whittemore, *Preliminary Report* (note 1 *supra*), 17; and J. D. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*, American Numismatic Society Numismatic Notes and Monographs, 144 (New York, 1959) (hereafter Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*), 49f.

<sup>36</sup> I. I. Tolstoi, *Vizantiis Moneta*, III (St. Petersburg, 1912), pl. 8,2 (Ravenna mint). This period of the fifth century is now the least explored, numismatically speaking, in the entire Roman-Byzantine series. Catalogues of Roman imperial coins, such as H. Mattingly et al., *The Roman Imperial Coinage* (London, 1923–67), have not reached it, while those of the Byzantine issues invariably follow the rule of beginning with Anastasius' coinage and reform of A.D. 491. Ironically, even in the Dumbarton Oaks publications the gap persists: Bellinger did not publish, as he had intended, the material that fell between his article, written with P. Bruun, J. P. C. Kent, and C. H. V. Sutherland, "Late Roman Gold and Silver Coins at Dumbarton Oaks: Diocletian to Eugenius," *DOP*, 18 (1964), 161–236, and the first volume of the Dumbarton Oaks *Coin Catalogue*. A truly Dark Age!

<sup>37</sup> Tolstoi, *op. cit.*, III, pl. 9,3; cf. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 8, making a significant point of the distinction.

<sup>38</sup> A. R. Bellinger, *DOC Coins*, I: *Anastasius to Maurice*, 491–602 (Washington, D.C., 1966), 59, nos. 7–9 (Constantinople mint).

<sup>39</sup> *Transfigurations*, 8 note 18. Cf. Bellinger, *DOC Coins*, I, 57f.; and *idem*, "The Gold of Justin I and Justinian I," *ANSMN*, 12 (1966), 90–92.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 12f.

<sup>31</sup> R. S. Cormack, "The Mosaic Decoration of S. Demetrios, Thessaloniki, in the Light of the Drawings of W. S. George," *BSA*, 64 (1969), 17–52, sought to date the lost mosaic as early as the fifth century, but Wright informed me that Cormack has since abandoned that position.

<sup>32</sup> A. H. S. Megaw and E. J. W. Hawkins, *The Church of the Panagia Kanakaria at Lythrakomi in Cyprus: Its Mosaics and Frescoes*, DOS, XIV (Washington, D.C., 1977), esp. 49–81, 85–98; cf. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 13f.

<sup>33</sup> Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 11f.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

After this series, however, there are no further types bearing two (or more) enthroned emperors on which the throne has anything but the curve-backed form. The first example occurs under Justin II (565–578), who not only insisted on formal association of his consort Sophia in his rule, but had her portrayed enthroned with him on the obverses of his copper coinage (fig. 14).<sup>40</sup> The fact that, in this type, Justin's right hand is holding the globus cruciger and obscures the throne back on his side, while the upright on Sophia's left is decidedly curved, seems scarcely worth comment, since it does not permit the assumption that any prototype throne might have had an asymmetrical shape.<sup>41</sup>

While the Heraclian emperors were far from averse to the institution of shared imperium—in fact, there was more than one Augustus during parts of every major reign in the dynasty—they early abandoned the image of syn-thronos to represent such combinations.<sup>42</sup> Instead, they reintroduced the portrayal of emperors standing side by side.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the next example of the curve-backed throne as a coin type occurs under Iconoclasm when, as Cutler observes,<sup>44</sup> it is likely to have been a deliberate revival of the sixth-century practice. Dynastic coupling of bust portraits became a favored practice on the coinage of the Isaurians from the reign of Constantine V onward, even including the images of deceased parents.<sup>45</sup> The

<sup>40</sup> Bellinger, *DOC Coins*, I, 204f., nos. 22–24 (Constantinople); 221–25, nos. 65–85 (Thessaloniki); 226–33, nos. 92–115 (Nicomedia); 234–39, nos. 117–35 (Cyzicus).

<sup>41</sup> Pace Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 7 note 14.

<sup>42</sup> The only occurrence of a seated pair is on the silver hexagram of Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine, Grierson's Class I of Thessaloniki: *DOC Coins*, II: *Phocas to Theodosius III*, 602–717 (Washington, D.C., 1968), 270–73, nos. 61–67. The throne appears to be backless on all examples.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–70. Examples include solidi of Heraclius with Heraclius Constantine and Heraclonias: *ibid.*, 257–64 (Class IV, A.D. 632–641); Constans II with his sons Constantine IV, Heraclius, and Tiberius: *ibid.*, 429–435 (Classes V–VII, A.D. 659–668); and Constantine IV with Heraclius and Tiberius: *ibid.*, 525–29 (Classes I–III, A.D. 668–681); all of the Constantinople mint. Versions of the type in silver and copper and examples from other mints may be found in Grierson's catalogue lists.

<sup>44</sup> *Transfigurations*, 8 note 18.

<sup>45</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 299–302, nos. 1–3, gold of the Constantinople mint; 306f., nos. 11, 12, copper of the same; further examples from provincial mints and in subsequent reigns, *passim*.

same Constantine V, however, also reintroduced the type with two emperors on a lyre-backed throne on his last issue of copper (fig. 15), associated by Grierson with the events of Easter 769, when the Empress Eudocia was crowned Augusta.<sup>46</sup>

The same basic type was repeated, mutatis mutandis, on the gold (fig. 16) and copper of Leo IV with his son Constantine VI, dating from 778–780.<sup>47</sup> This is, apparently, the last use of the enthroned type on coinage during the iconoclastic period, although some sort of seat may be inferred as support for the seated figures of three deceased emperors on the crowded reverse type of the gold minted under the regency of Irene (780–790).<sup>48</sup> It may be that identification of the type with the Isaurian dynasty made it unwelcome to later rulers. Whatever the reason, it is a fact that, although subsequent iconoclast emperors continued to associate their heirs on their coin types and legends, none used the image of the corulers enthroned.

When the throne image does return to the coins, under Basil the Macedonian, it appears to be a distinct revival, not repeating the types used on the Isaurian coins. On Constantopolitan folles of Basil with his son Constantine, presumably dating from 868–870, the two are seated on a wide seat with an emphatically rectilinear back (fig. 17).<sup>49</sup> Later in his reign, in 879–886, after the death of Constantine, Basil appears alone on folles where he is seated on a throne whose back is evidently curved both vertically and horizontally (fig. 18), not in my view lyre-shaped at all, despite Grierson's conventional use of the term.<sup>50</sup> Both types are

Grierson draws attention on pp. 9 and 292 to the possible derivation of these genealogical types from the Islamic practice of using filiation formulae in personal names (e.g., 'Abd el-Malik ibn Marwān) which were then employed as major components of their aniconic coin types after the Reform of the 690's.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 290, 295, 207f., nos. 13, 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 329f. (Class II of Constantinople), 333f. (Class 2 of Constantinople), 334f. (follis of Syracuse).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 340f. (Class I of Constantinople).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 494–96 (Class II); cf. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 8 note 20.

<sup>50</sup> *DOC Coins*, III, 500f. (Class 5 of Constantinople). Cutler, *loc. cit.*, has followed the *British Museum Catalogue* in placing this type at the beginning of Basil's reign; Grierson's rationale for moving it to the end, reversing the accepted sequence, is given in *DOC Coins*, III, 482, 485.

repeated on the folles of Leo VI: one has Leo seated alone on a throne with the curvilinear back of Basil's solo coppers,<sup>51</sup> while Leo and Alexander appear together on a wide throne with a rectilinear back, as did Basil and Constantine.<sup>52</sup>

There is some similarity between the curvilinear back of the throne(s) depicted on coins of Leo and Basil alone, and those portrayed in Basil's great volume of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus as seats for the fourth-century emperors Julian and Valens, where the double-curved uprights are joined by a curved crossbar that, to me at least, implies a rearward curve in the horizontal structure of the throne back (fig. 28).<sup>53</sup>

If one believes that the die-sinkers in the imperial mint workshops were required in this period to reproduce exactly on the coins actual articles of use, it must be conceded that there could have been no single throne serving as model for all the varied ones shown, as this writer once claimed.<sup>54</sup> Cutler has pointed out the differing characteristics of these various numismatic thrones, following his analysis of that in the key monument, the narthex mosaic at Hagia Sophia. The designation "lyre-backed," he

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 515f. (Class 1 of Constantinople).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 516f. (Class 2 of Constantinople). Grierson makes it clear (510f.) that his sequence is arbitrary, in the absence of any evidence on the relative precedence of Leo's issues in copper.

<sup>53</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS grec 510, fols. 374v, 104: Omont, *op. cit.* (note 10 *supra*), pls. LIII, XXXI. Christ on the Frontispiece, fol. A<sup>v</sup> (*ibid.*, pl. XV; my fig. 2), is seated on a throne with a form still more similar to that on the copper coins; but since this miniature is heavily repainted and even redrawn, it is not certain evidence of the throne's original form. A useful study might be made of the wide variety of furniture depicted in the miniatures of this manuscript.

<sup>54</sup> Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, 49; but I have never believed that photographic accuracy of depiction was a significant concern of the Byzantine artist or his patron. In any case, I have also always suspected that more than one throne—of the same basic form—was used in the Sacred Palace over the span of 500 years, perhaps even longer: cf. the enthroned Nicephorus III Botaniates (1078–81) as portrayed on fols. 1 and 2 of the volume of Homilies of John Chrysostom, MS Coislin 79 in Paris (Omont, *op. cit.*, pls. LXI, LXII). This emperor portrait has recently been reidentified as a relabeled image of Michael VII (1071–78): I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, *Byzantina Neerlandica*, 6 (Leiden, 1976), 107–18.

states, does not imply the actual musical instrument, but rather a form that resembles it, in which the upright members of the throne back curve outward from the seat, return toward the crossbar, and then end in a reverse curve often expressed as a vertical finial above the crossbar.<sup>55</sup> The critical indicators for Cutler are then the double curve of the upright—which must be visible and symmetrical on both sides<sup>56</sup>—and the points of intersection with the crossbar. His distinction between the upper curves of the two uprights of the throne in Hagia Sophia (fig. 1), however, is too subtle to be perceptible; what I perceive, on the other hand, is that the "orbs" or bosses on those same uprights are placed asymmetrically with respect to each other, the one on the viewer's right being at the outer point of the curve, with five cabochons visible above it within the upright, while the one on the left is below that outer point, with seven cabochons above.

Cutler discounts any similarity between this mosaic throne and that on Basil's solidi on the grounds of the absence of finials above the crossbar of the numismatic throne (fig. 7). He takes this to indicate that there is no reverse curve at the top of the arc.<sup>57</sup> He asserts instead that "the first true numismatic analogy to the imagine [sic] over the Imperial Door" appears on Basil's copper coins (fig. 18),<sup>58</sup> where we see the "clearly lyre-shaped, double-curved back of the broad throne."<sup>59</sup> Perusal of the plates of the Dumbarton Oaks catalogue, or for that matter the coins themselves, reveals no such double curve in the uprights; but it does show that the crossbar is distinctly curved—a point neither mentioned by Cutler, nor conformable to the presumed lyre shape.<sup>60</sup>

Although Cutler does see that on all of the images of the Virgin and Child seated on a throne with curved uprights, the latter are characterized by an upward taper simulating the form of animals' horns, he does not make this distinction among the thrones in images of

<sup>55</sup> *Transfigurations*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 note 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 6f.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, pl. XXXIII, 12.1–12.6. It might be noted that Cutler's reproduction of this coin, *Transfigurations*, fig. 4, is so dark that neither curvature is visible as it is in, e.g., the plates of *DOC Coins*.

the seated Christ, on which the tapering upright is only found on the early mosaic in Ravenna (fig. 4). The uprights do taper, on the other hand, on the imperial thrones of the curve-backed form in the ninth-century miniatures of the Paris Gregory manuscript (fig. 28). Since the latter examples are in scenes portraying emperors of the fourth century, Julian and Valens, it might be possible to argue that this type of throne back was understood to be an early one at the time it was used in the Macedonian manuscript—a time when the animal horn reference itself was likely to have been forgotten.

Before pursuing further the question of the different forms of thrones on these various religious and imperial images, we must examine more closely the forms on the gold coins issued by the Macedonian emperors. The earliest appear on solidi of Basil I, alone and with his son Constantine, dating from the first part of his reign (Grierson suggests 868 for the solo type) through 879 (fig. 7).<sup>61</sup> The throne in this coin type is treated with disparagement by all numismatist commentators: Grierson termed the entire type “crude and unprepossessing.”<sup>62</sup> He did explain the disproportionate size of Christ’s feet, and the asymmetric imbalance of the two sides of the throne back, on the other hand, as adjustments intended to convey the fact that Christ is not viewed frontally, but from His left. Still, the head is much too large for its body, the left leg thick and its drapery clumsy, and the right hand equally clumsy in its gesture of benediction; the book on His left knee balances without visible support.

Bellinger initiated, as I have indicated, an awareness of the important distinctions between this and the image of the enthroned Christ employed on the gold of Basil’s successor, Leo VI (fig. 8).<sup>63</sup> Grierson, too, considered this

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 487–89 (Classes I and II of Constantinople).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>63</sup> “...on the type of Basil I.... The right hand, with claw-like fingers, extends beyond the back of the throne; the thick left leg is thrust forward, while the right foot is a mere angle of lines. The throne is undecorated and the lyre-back small. There are globes to left and right which are probably intended for the ends of the throne’s arms.... It is a clumsy and unattractive type. Nevertheless it is repeated with a fidelity which suggests that it is the copy of a well-known image ....”

design “a great improvement” over its predecessor, even though the head is still too large. But the perspective is more correct, the drapery “works,” the throne is elaborately decorated, Christ’s fingers hold the book by the spine, and so forth. “The design clearly reproduces a different icon, presumably one completed in Leo VI’s own reign.”<sup>64</sup>

Alexander employed the image of the enthroned Christ on his own solidi (fig. 9), but with variations from both preceding types: “This design...probably corresponds to no particular icon at all.”<sup>65</sup> The type reverts to the “crude” style of Basil’s, while retaining the decorative ornament of the throne on Leo’s coins. Grierson attributes this retrograde change to Alexander’s perverse desire “to undo anything his brother had done, even if it meant reintroducing a thoroughly unsatisfactory design on the coins.”<sup>66</sup>

Under Constantine VII, the Christ type of Basil was revived far more precisely than on coins of Alexander, first on solidi struck in the names of the boy and his mother Zoe (as Regent) from 914 to 919, and then with Romanus I during the next two years, until Christopher was crowned and introduced to the coinage (fig. 10).<sup>67</sup>

“This in itself would cause no surprise were it not for the fact that its first two appearances under Basil, and Constantine VII with his mother Zoe... are separated by a much more pleasing variety [of] ...Leo VI and Constantine. The right foot is still emaciated but the left is in better proportion, the drapery better expressed. The right hand just emerges from the colobium. The throne is larger and decorated by rows of pellets, the double row of the cross bar being particularly delicate.... The most tempting explanation is that there were two famous icons, very similar but not identical and that sometimes one was preferred as a type, sometimes the other.” Bellinger, “The Coins of Constantine” (note 23 *supra*), 152f.

<sup>64</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 156.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* Grierson is betrayed—as was Bellinger before him—by an unconscious bias toward illusionism which is at the same time post-medieval yet decidedly unmodern. This disposition is inappropriate for evaluating the intentions of artists, die-cutters, patrons, or viewers in the ninth or tenth century A.D. Nevertheless, this literal point of view provides certain insights into the execution of the images, which may be interpreted into Byzantine terms with the aid of a more sophisticated critic such as G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (London, 1963), esp. 23–37.

<sup>67</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 542f. (Classes II–IV of Constantinople).

Following a coronation issue, the same enthroned image returned to the dies for another decade.<sup>68</sup>

Before the death of Christopher in August 931, however, a new type of the enthroned Christ was introduced on a gold issue,<sup>69</sup> to remain in use after 931 until the fall of Romanus I in December 944.<sup>70</sup> The same type reappears on a brief issue of Constantine VII and his own son, Romanus II, dated by Grierson to 945, the period of Constantine's sudden liberation from Lecapenus domination.<sup>71</sup> This type draws enthusiastic comment from Grierson, who considered it "by far the best representation of a Christ seated on a lyre-backed throne....this variety of coin design is the only one that the narthex mosaic at all resembles."<sup>72</sup>

As already noted, Grierson and Cutler (among others) group this sequence of types identically, even though the first puts almost all weight of discrimination on the gestures of Christ, something rarely noticed by Cutler, who is obsessed by the details of curvature of the throne-back uprights. Both men concur with Bellinger, however, in expecting each variation in pose or form to reflect some fresh prototype in the arts outside the coinage.

There is one more factor in the equation that is being analyzed here: that of the likeness of Christ Himself as shown enthroned, in full-length as well as in bust images. Grierson established five different types of bust image, making his distinctions on the basis of the positions of the hands in each case.<sup>73</sup> Thus, his first group, Type V (fig. 19), is described in terms of the book being held from beneath, the right hand in front turned toward the book; Types V through VIII show the book clasped to the body; Type VI (fig. 20), the right hand turned toward the body; Type VII (fig. 21), the book held from beneath, the hand in the sling of the cloak; Type VIII (fig. 22), the book clasped to the breast; and Type IX, the right hand in the sling of the cloak. Other aspects of the image, including the actual portrait of Christ, its coiffure, and even its shape, are given no more than cursory atten-

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 546f. (Class VII).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 547f. (Class VIII).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 549 (Class IX); Grierson's arguments for this chronology are found on p. 535.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 551f. (Class XIV); discussion p. 535.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 157f.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 152f., with description of his Types V-IX; discussion on pp. 164-69.

tion. In V(a), for example, "Head with curly beard" is used, as against V(f), "Head with long beard."

Conversely, on the three known solidi of Romanus II, where the appearance of the portrait type of Christ is identical in all examples, a unique type-group is established to accommodate one die in which the right arm is horizontal and the hand upturned (Type VI, fig. 20).<sup>74</sup> The only other element which distinguishes this type from its counterpart is the apparent veiling of Christ's left hand as it covers the book; otherwise, the physical type and features, even details such as the dotting of the cross-halo, are substantially identical. On the other hand, Type VIII(b), initiated by Nicephorus II, has a Christ (fig. 23) with a pose identical to that of VIII(a), but with a face and coiffure totally different—not just in terms of the curliness of the beard mentioned by Grierson, but in the entire proportional relation of the upper to the lower part of the head, which begins here to conform to the standard Middle Byzantine formula of construction.<sup>75</sup>

Undoubtedly, some significance adhered to these differences in the gestures of Christ; but unfortunately it has as yet proven impossible to establish what that may have been in any particular case, as for example between gestures of blessing and those of address.<sup>76</sup> It is reasonable, therefore, to give first consideration to the conformation of the features of Christ and to His attributes, regarding which some information is available.

What has been recognized is that a common Christ portrait is reflected on Byzantine coins of Justinian II, struck in 695-698 before the start of the iconoclastic controversy (fig. 19), and on those of Michael III, struck immediately following its conclusion, in about 843 (fig. 24). Subsequently, this same type, then, is the basis of the more elegant portrait seen on gold coins

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 166, with the remark: "The gesture on the coin is so distinctive that it seems likely to have behind it some particular icon."

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 167f. On the standard formula of proportion, still fundamental is E. Panofsky, "Die Entwicklung der Proportionslehre als Abbild der Stilentwicklung," *Monatshefte für Kunswissenschaft*, 4 (1921), 188-219; trans. "The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles," *idem, Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York, 1955), 55-107, esp. 74-83.

<sup>76</sup> Cf., e.g., Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 150.

of Constantine VII from 945–959 (fig. 25) and of his son Romanus II during the next four years.<sup>77</sup> The same portrait type, with oval head, flowing hair, and distinctive part with two falling locks, was used as the head of Christ for the full-length enthroned image on the coins of Basil I, Leo VI, Alexander, and Constantine VII (figs. 7–10).<sup>78</sup> This is, essentially, the same portrait head as that of the Christ in the narthex mosaic of Hagia Sophia (fig. 1); most recently, the same type has also been recognized in a pre-iconoclastic icon at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai (fig. 29).<sup>79</sup> Similar but not identical examples may be cited from the sixth through the eighth centuries.<sup>80</sup>

The head of Christ in all these images may be described as a rounded oval, with hair falling alongside the full, rounded beard. This long hair, which seems in some die examples slightly waved, is parted at the center of the forehead; two escaping short strands seem to have been considered characteristic and important, for they almost invariably appear even on small-scale specimens. The hair falls over the ears and behind the draped shoulders. The right hand, in a gesture of speech or blessing, is held in front of the breast in bust images through the end of the ninth century, but turned outward in seated ones until the issues of Constantine VII's sole reign in 945.

The left hand is not visible in the field of the early bust types where the book appears unsupported in front of the left breast; nor is it visible on the enthroned Christ type of Basil I, as we have seen. It does appear at the side, holding the book on the knee, in the enthroned types of Leo and Alexander. Constantine VII's first type of the enthroned Christ, closely imitating Basil's in this as in other details, has no visible left hand; but his later Type X (with Romanus I) does show it, as do the bust images of Christ on his

<sup>77</sup> Comprising Grierson's Types V(a), V(c), VIII(a), and VI: *ibid.*, 164–68.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–58, as Types I(a), I(b), I(c), and I(d).

<sup>79</sup> K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons, I: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century* (Princeton, 1976), 13–15, Icon B.1 (fig. A, pls. I, II, XXXIX–XL).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 16; cf. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, 46f. note 3. Kitzinger, *op. cit.* (note 28 *supra*), 120f., while dating the Sinai icon as late as ca. 700, emphasizes even more strongly than Weitzmann the link to Justinian II's coin type.

Type XV, after 944.<sup>81</sup> On the types of Justinian II and Michael III the cross behind the head of Christ is not nimbed; all later enthroned and bust types have the standard cross-in-halo, with more or less ornamentation.

Since I formulated this sequence of relationships twenty years ago,<sup>82</sup> it has won general acceptance with an ease that has almost surprised me. The key step in the process was shown to be the copying of the coin type of Justinian II on the gold of Michael III immediately after the Restoration of the Images.<sup>83</sup> Even though Grierson refused to accept my evidence for this copying, he has accepted my conclusion that the one type is wholly dependent on the other.<sup>84</sup> I see the coin obverses of Justinian II as the most immediately available religious images in Constantinople at the moment when, after perhaps a thirty years' hiatus, religious images were once more available for use by imperial power.<sup>85</sup>

The legend on Justinian II's obverse with Christ reads continuously IHSCRISTOSREX-REGNANTIU<sup>M</sup> (fig. 19);<sup>86</sup> but on Michael's coins this was reduced to merely IESUS CHRISTOS (fig. 24).<sup>87</sup> The complete title, in

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, pl. xxxvi.

<sup>82</sup> Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, 46–59.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 47; cf. Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 463f. (Classes II and III of Constantinople), with discussion on 454f., 458.

<sup>84</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 458. My own argument lay in the observation (which was scarcely original) that some dies of Michael III and Theodora show an error in copying, with the hair on Christ's left side falling down in front of His shoulder rather than behind it, as on the model (figs. 24, 19). Grierson insisted that the apparent blunder is only the result of wear on either coins or dies, or both, not of a misunderstanding of the original type. Reexamination confirms my original observation, since specimens showing little if any wear on either the coin or the die—all lines crisp and sharp—nevertheless show distinctly that the lines of hair fall down in front of the breast, between the neck and the horizontal line of the shoulder, without confusion, crossing, or blurring of the two sets of lines. Cf. *ibid.*, pl. xxviii, 2.2 and 3.2; or Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, pl. v, 31 and 32. Of course, as long as the thesis of copying is conceded, disagreement over the evidence is of slight importance.

<sup>85</sup> A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin, Dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1957), 183–257.

<sup>86</sup> Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, 22.

<sup>87</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 463.

the form IHS XPS REX REGNANTIUM, reappears on the solidi of Basil I—accompanying not the bust of Christ but His enthroned image (fig. 7).<sup>88</sup> This transfer of so specific a formula of nomenclature helps to confirm that the earlier bust portrait must be understood as a detail of a larger, full-length image of Christ enthroned.<sup>89</sup> The correspondence, of course, depends on more than just the similarity of coin legends; although the head on Basil's coins is crudely drawn and out of proportion to the body, its conformation coincides with that of Michael's coin type and with no other except that of Justinian II. The gesture of Christ on Basil's coin type differs from that on the bust portraits, as it does from that in the Hagia Sophia mosaic; but this is the only notable discrepancy, as against a remarkable number of similarities.

Grierson opposed the identification of the Justinian II/Michael III head of Christ with that of the enthroned Christ on Basil's solidi, not so much on the ground of the different position of the right hand—outward on the latter, inward on the others—but because of His left, which is of course invisible on both types!<sup>90</sup> In Grierson's opinion, a seated man would hold a large book at the top or side when balancing it on his knee. Where the hand is invisible in a bust image, he insisted it must be supporting the book at the bottom, and consequently the figure must be standing.

The only early standing figure of Christ in a known icon is that on the Chalke Gate of the Great Palace, which was indeed a key monument in the tangled course of the iconoclastic controversy because of its prominent public location. It seems to have been invariably the first image destroyed and the first replaced at each turn of events in the dispute.<sup>91</sup> Grierson makes a convincing case for recognizing the Chalke image in the figure of the standing Christ crowning Romanus I on the solidi issued in A.D. 921 (fig. 26)<sup>92</sup>—an image which, like that

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 487.

<sup>89</sup> Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, 48–52.

<sup>90</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 164.

<sup>91</sup> C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Arkeol.-kunsthist. Meddelelser udg. af Kong. Danske Vidensk. Selsk., IV, 4 (Copenhagen, 1959), 108–48.

<sup>92</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 544f. (Classes V and VI); for discussion, p. 160f.

on the Justinian II/Michael III obverses, lacks the nimbus around the cross behind the head.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, the head on this coin type is much less similar to that of the bust images of Christ than is the head of Basil's enthroned Christ (fig. 7): Romanus' Christ portrait is in fact closest to that on Constantine VII's earlier coins. The safer conclusion would seem to be that the resemblance between all these heads is of a general character and is the consequence of a common origin in time, in major works in the style of the first period following the Restoration of the Images in 843.<sup>94</sup>

When it comes to the question of a specific prototype for the standing portrait type, it seems unlikely that Romanus, the interloper, would have chosen an image of Christ most closely identified with the dynasty he was supplanting—especially on a coronation coin type. An alternate like the Chalke image, which had equal claim to antiquity without specific dynastic associations and which was permanently visible to the public, would have been far more attractive for his purpose.

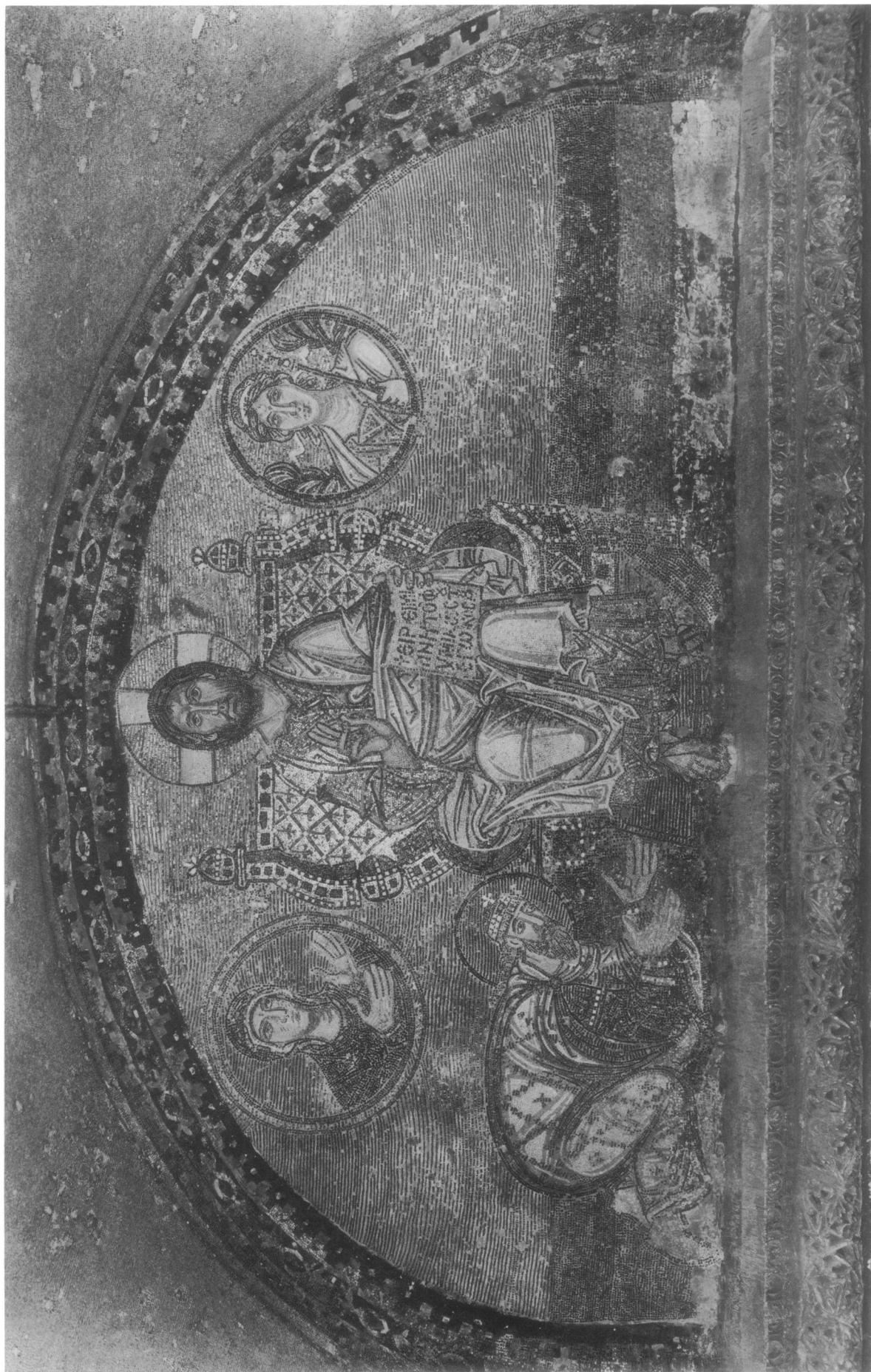
The fundamental weakness of Grierson's argument, however, lies in his insistence that only a standing figure can hold a book at its lower edge. While this may indeed be valid when the terms are reversed (a standing figure can only hold a large book at the bottom edge), the evidence will not sustain the statement as made. To cite only one exception, the earliest extant image of the enthroned Christ with imperial attributes, the apse mosaic of S. Pudenziana in Rome of about 410,<sup>95</sup> shows the book poised on His left knee and supported by His left hand *at the bottom* (fig. 30).<sup>96</sup> It seems that we cannot consider that the absence of a visible

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 158, pl. xxxvi, 5–6.

<sup>94</sup> For a new systematization of the stylistic development of Constantinopolitan art in the ninth century, see now K. Weitzmann, "The Classical Mode in the Period of the Macedonian Emperors: Continuity or Revival?" *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina*, I: *The "Past" in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture* (Malibu, 1978), 71–85.

<sup>95</sup> W. F. Volbach and M. Hirmer, *Early Christian Art: The Late Roman and Byzantine Empires from the Third to the Seventh Centuries* (New York, 1971), pl. 130, p. 336f.

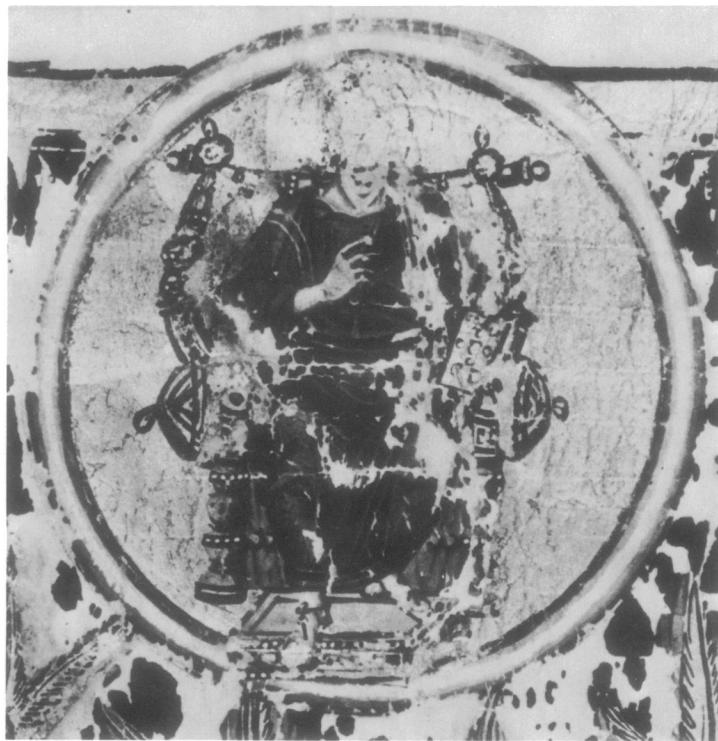
<sup>96</sup> It may be noted that the structural form of the back of the throne in this mosaic is concealed by drapery, but that it is distinctly wider at the top than at the bottom where it joins the seat: could it be lyre-shaped?



1. Istanbul, Hagia Sophia. Lunette Mosaic, An Emperor before Christ Enthroned

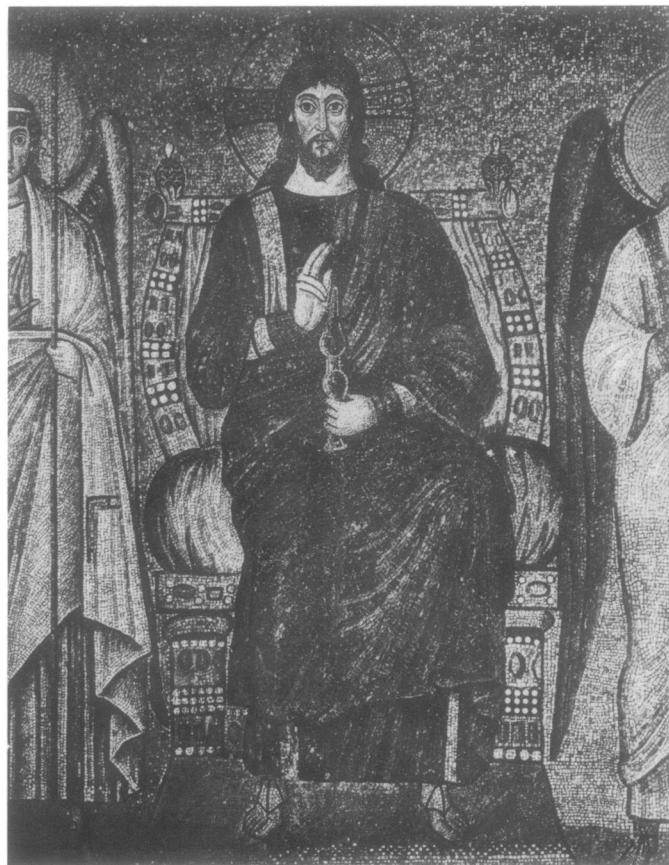


2. Fol. Av, Christ Enthroned



3. Fol. 67v, The Vision of Isaiah, detail, Christ Enthroned

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS gr. 510



4. Ravenna, S. Apollinare Nuovo.  
Wall Mosaic, Christ Enthroned



5. Grado, Cathedral Treasury. Silver Reliquary Lid,  
The Virgin Enthroned



6. Rome, S. Maria Antiqua. Fresco, The Virgin and Child Enthroned



7. Whittemore Collection.  
Solidus, Basil I and Constantine

8. Solidus, Leo VI and  
Constantine VII

9. Solidus, Alexander

Dumbarton Oaks Collection



10. Solidus, Constantine VII  
and Romanus I



11. Solidus, Leo I  
and Leo II



12. American Numismatic  
Society Collection. Solidus,  
Zeno and Leo II



Dumbarton Oaks Collection



13. Solidus, Justin I and  
Justinian I



14. Follis, Justin II and Sophia

15. Follis, Constantine V  
and Leo IV



16. Follis, Leo IV  
and Constantine VI

17. Follis, Basil I and  
Constantine

18. Follis, Basil I

Dumbarton Oaks Collection



19. American Numismatic Society Collection.  
Solidus, Justinian II



20. Solidus, Romanus



21. Solidus Pattern, Alexander  
Dumbarton Oaks Collection



22. Solidus, Romanus II



25. Solidus,  
Constantine VII

23. Histamenon, Nicephorus II  
and Basil II



26. Solidus, Romanus I with  
Christopher and Constantine VII

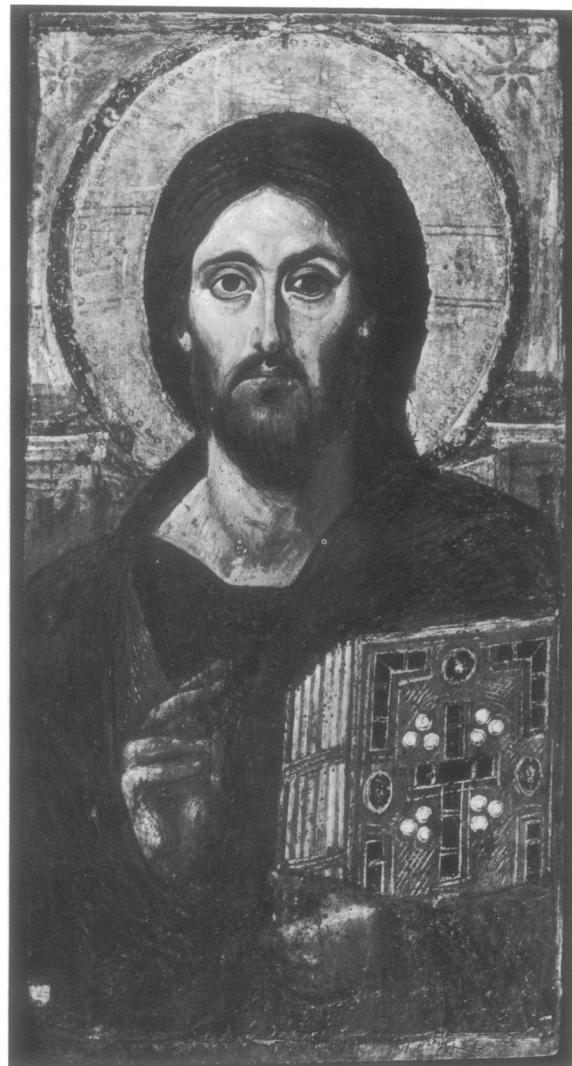


27. Follis, Leo VI

Dumbarton Oaks Collection



28. Paris. Bibliothèque Nationale, MS gr. 510, fol. 104r,  
The Emperor Valens at his Son's Deathbed



29. Mt. Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine.  
Icon, Christ Blessing



30. Rome, S. Pudenziana. Apse Mosaic, detail, Christ Enthroned

left hand in a medallion of Christ necessarily implies that the prototype was a standing figure;<sup>97</sup> nor need we deny the obvious resemblance between the face of Christ on the earlier coin issues and that of the enthroned Christ on the later ones.

The consensus of opinion has identified Basil's Christ type with the image in the conch of the Chrysotrichion of the Great Palace, known from the texts as the other monumental icon of Christ beside the one at the Chalke Gate to have been restored by Michael III.<sup>98</sup> The next question is whether the next coin type of the enthroned Christ, that of Leo VI (fig. 8), was inspired by an altogether different model, such as the Hagia Sophia mosaic, or is simply a numismatic variant. Grierson insisted that the type must reflect a new prototype, but denied that this could be the mosaic because of differences in the pose of Christ.<sup>99</sup> He of course considered the later type of Constantine VII the only coin image sufficiently similar to be related to the mosaic (fig. 10).<sup>100</sup> Cutler considers the mosaic as being of the same period as Leo's solidi, but he does not tie them together tightly.<sup>101</sup>

Under the circumstances, I find no reason to withdraw my earlier description of the relation between these various types:

1. An image of the enthroned Christ was erected in the conch of the Chrysotrichion, a ceremonial throne room in the Sacred Palace at Constantinople which was built or rebuilt by Justin II (565–578) and whose decoration was completed by Tiberius II (578–582).
2. The particular likeness of Christ embodied in this image was reflected in a number of

<sup>97</sup> In Basil I's enthroned Christ the left hand is not visible at all; the hand at the edge of the book is indicated only on coins of the next reign. In the Roman mosaic, the hand supporting the book would be outside the field of a roundel excising the bust of Christ for a medallion.

<sup>98</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 154–56; Bellinger, "The Coins of Constantine," 152f.; and Breckinridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, 52–56.

<sup>99</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 156.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 156–58.

<sup>101</sup> Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 16: "The first sure Constantinopolitan examples [of the lyre-backed throne!] do not antedate the coins of Leo VI... and the mosaic in Hagia Sophia of the same period...."

preiconoclastic icons such as the one preserved at St. Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai.

3. The bust of Christ, based on this image as an imperial emblem, was placed on coins struck in 692–695 by Justinian II (685–695, 705–711).
4. The image of the enthroned Christ in the Chrysotrichion must have been destroyed by the iconoclast emperors in or about 730.
5. The bust image on Justinian II's coins was copied on solidi of Michael III (842–867) after the Restoration of Images in 843. The same emperor is recorded to have restored, among others, the image in the Chrysotrichion as an enthroned figure placed directly above the actual imperial throne.
6. This Christ image was the source of the portrait type for the figure of the enthroned Christ on coins of Basil I (867–886), which confirm the relationship by using the same inscription (Jesus Christ Rex Regnantium) as on the coins of Justinian II cited above in Number 3.
7. The image of the enthroned Christ had specifically imperial associations for Justin II and presumably Tiberius II; Justinian II; perhaps Michael III; certainly Basil I; and presumably his successors in the Macedonian dynasty who appropriated this specific Christ portrait, for example for the tympanum mosaic over the imperial door into Hagia Sophia. This identification with the Macedonians could have been the reason for this image's disappearance from the coins of Nicephorus II, but also for its revival a century later.
8. On the other hand, the special significance of this particular portrait type would have been forgotten by the eleventh century; hence the remainder of the Middle Byzantine period saw the development of a wide range of variations on this image in the use of both the oval-headed Christ in bust, with free strands where the hair parts (as in Sicily), and Christ enthroned on a wide variety of seats, without any suggestion of specific imperial associations.

Acceptance of this outline requires some change in our assumptions of how details of such images were transmitted. We must reconcile the statement of Cutler that the thrones must have

been rendered precisely since other regalia like the labarum or globus were depicted with meticulous care,<sup>102</sup> with Grierson's assumption that, while "artists' whims" might have led to improvements in rendering attributes like crosses or book covers, similar freedom was unlikely with regard to the pose or gestures of Christ.<sup>103</sup> It is certainly true that wide variations appear, for example in the cross nimbus of Christ on the anonymous bronze coinage initiated by John I in 970; the same is true of book covers on the same coins.<sup>104</sup> It is obvious that the die-cutters did indeed have great freedom to vary ornamental detail from die to die. On the analogy of other coinages, moreover, we might infer that this was encouraged officially, in order to make it easier to recognize changes in mint administration, work teams, metal supply, and the like.

Yet it is difficult to understand a basis on which certain parts of a coin type—the halo or the cover of Holy Writ—were open to such free play, while another part—the throne, for instance—was immutable. If, as we have seen, the entire type of Christ image was changed on the solidi of Alexander (fig. 9) for no other purpose than to make it clear that these coins were of a new monarch, hostile to his predecessor, the same motivation could as easily have justified the change from the Christ type of Basil I to that of his (foster?)son Leo VI, between whom no love was lost; or from the type of Constantine VII with his father-in-law Romanus Lecapenus to that without him.

If we accept the hypothesis that the image of Christ enthroned on the solidi of Basil was based on the mosaic in the imperial throne room, then we must ask how the die-cutter obtained a copy of that image for making his die. The least likely

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 note 21: "The argument for a particular form of throne rendered with greatly varying degrees of accuracy...will not stand in the face of the often meticulous representation of such smaller regalia as the *labarum*, the *globus crucifer* [sic], etc."

<sup>103</sup> Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 151: "The die-sinkers would presumably have been free to improve on their models in such matters as the design of the nimbus crosses and the cover of the Gospel Book, but gestures and the arrangement of the body would have been less susceptible to variation at the artists' whims." Why one system of pellets in a halo is an "improvement" over another is a difficult thing to decide.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 634–706; cf. such variations on coins illustrated on pls. LII–LIII, or LV.

way is that he walked the long distance from the imperial workshops and was allowed into the ceremonial areas of the Sacred Palace to make a direct sketch. Use of a purely verbal description is improbable; it is most likely that he had some sort of copy or drawing made by a worker in another medium. The intervention of a third hand between model and coin die would have increased the likelihood that the final image was conditioned not only by the stylistic traits of the monumental original, but also by the individual idiosyncrasies of both the copyist and the die-sinker.

The characteristics of Basil's type (fig. 7) agree with such a theory. Constantinopolitan art in the first half of the ninth century, as Weitzmann has recently shown,<sup>105</sup> was in a phase of relatively anticlassical and antinaturalistic portrayal, strongly reducing figures to geometrical shapes. At the same time, the seated figure here is more drastically out of proportion than any full-scale Byzantine mosaic can conceivably have been, whatever the stylistic fashion. This could be the consequence of the copyist's failure to take proper account of the surface curvature of an apse; or just the result of ineptitude. In either case, recognition of the comparative inaccuracy of the copy on the die could have led, in the next reign, to the production of a revised and corrected design. That, I claim, is what we find on the gold of Leo VI: not the copy of a new icon, but a more accurate version of the same original. The head is reduced in proportion to the body, the position of the legs is drawn more correctly, and the extended right arm is pulled closer to the body. But the underlying image is the same.

Subsequent issues devolve into an alternation of types initiated by this revision. This may have come about as a way of differentiating issues on a mechanical basis; but the alteration of types must also have owed much to ideological and political motives. Alexander's die-sinkers blended the images of Basil's and Leo's coin types, while Constantine at first reverted to a purer version of Basil's, before sponsoring, with Romanus I, a new revision which is the most naturalistic of all. At the same time, the art of the coinage was at last catching up with the stylistic development of the major arts—at least for a generation or so.

<sup>105</sup> Weitzmann, "The Classical Mode" (note 94 *supra*), 74–81.

Any attempt to trace the history of this particular Christ image should not operate on the assumption that every detail of its form, pose, and attributes must follow without variation from generation to generation. On the contrary, what we know of other Byzantine icon types indicates that wide variations were permitted from one example to the next.<sup>106</sup> The general development of the iconography, however, can be traced through evidence that we find difficult to question.

If this history of the image of the enthroned Christ is now clear, then the only remaining question is that of the meaning of the curve- or lyre-backed throne. As we have seen, in all instances prior to the ninth century this form appears on coins *only* to support the enthronement of two or more Augusti. In point of fact, no single Augustus is represented seated in coin types until the issues of Basil I (fig. 18). It would seem that the preiconoclastic image of imperial enthronement was exclusively synthronos, with the curve-backed throne used more commonly than any other form.

The appearance of the Virgin and Child on such a throne, in the very period that such a throne assumed importance in the imperial imagery, suggests that the concept of synthronos was also being applied to religious images.<sup>107</sup> Shown alone on this type of throne, then, the image of Christ would present simultaneously more than just the person of the Son, perhaps the combined Creator and Savior—a definition of the later concept of the Pantocrator.<sup>108</sup>

The image identified by its legend as “Jesus Christ Rex Regnantium” is not, however,

<sup>106</sup> Professor Weitzmann has observed in correspondence, “Here you meet in principle the same situation as, e.g., within icon painting. You have, e.g., a certain number of variations of the Hodegetria type, in the position of the hands, etc. This obviously does not mean that there were several basic types of the Hodegetria. There was enough room for variations of the same archetype just as there was room for variations by the die cutter.”

<sup>107</sup> This concept, in terms of the seated Virgin holding the Child Jesus in her lap, is more explicit in the West: I. H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* (Princeton, 1972), 1 and note 1.

<sup>108</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1964), *Micropaedia*, VII, 726. The only monograph is C. Capuzzi, Παντοκράτωρ. *Saggio d'esegesi letterario-iconografica* (Rome, 1964), which, however, extends the term so widely as to fail to define it; cf. Grierson, *DOC Coins*, III, 149f. note 452.

meant to represent the Pantocrator:<sup>109</sup> for this term describes a deity who reigns directly over all the universe, whereas the legend describes the Son of God who rules the earth through the regency of his emperor.<sup>110</sup> On the coins of Justinian II that emperor stands alone before this imperial Christ, holding the cross which is an attribute of Christ.<sup>111</sup> Both before and after this, however, there are hints that multiple emperors were interpreted in trinitarian terms.<sup>112</sup> Coemperors enthroned in the Chrysotrichion below a mosaic image expressing such a relationship similarly asserted corulership with the divine power represented above them, in what would be understood as mirrored majesty.<sup>113</sup>

Apparently from its beginnings a type with special imperial significance, this image of Christ cannot have been widely reproduced in pre-iconoclastic art. At the same time, given the heavy investment of symbolic ramification, it is equally unlikely that the emperor would have been shown alone on the same throne. After the Restoration of the Images, however, such subtleties are likely to have been forgotten. What now mattered was the antiquity of the image within the Sacred Palace, and its dynastic identification with the Macedonian house. The curve-backed throne itself came into more common use, even for single rulers, and also for

<sup>109</sup> E.g., E. Kirschbaum, ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, I (Rome, 1968), 392.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*, 48–52. The concept has Hellenistic antecedents: H. Hommel, “Pantokrator,” *Theologia Viatorum*, 5 (Berlin, 1953–54), 322–73 and ex cursus.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Grabar, *op. cit.* (note 85 *supra*), 40.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. this recent query about the reign of Basil I: “Was there at this date a preference for naming three, but not more than three co-rulers?” D. M. Metcalf, “Basil, Constantine, and Alexander: An Enigmatic Byzantine Follis of the Ninth Century,” *Situla: Razprave Narodnega Muzeja Ljubljani*, 14–15 (1974), 270, with the oft-cited assertion by the troops of the Anatolic theme to Constantine IV (father of Justinian II) in 670 that, because they believed in the Holy Trinity, they wished to be ruled by three crowned monarchs: Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), 352, 15. Cf. Grabar, *op. cit.*, 39f.

<sup>113</sup> Such an explanation, which seems less abstract than Cutler's relating the lyre-backed throne to the instrument of Orpheus (*Transfigurations*, 45–52), need not exclude that interpretation as one component of the total concept of the synthronos.

Christ and then for the Virgin alone, as Cutler has shown.<sup>114</sup>

What then of a possible prototypical imperial throne in this form? It is indeed probably too much to claim that a single throne was the physical model for all these pictured ones which, after all, spread across fully five centuries.<sup>115</sup> Of later historical thrones only one has that sort of longevity, the so-called Seat of St. Edward the Confessor in Westminister Abbey, made by Walter of Durham, the King's Painter, between 1297 and 1301,<sup>116</sup> and still the focus of British coronation ceremonies. One may suspect that only its lack of intrinsic worth, such as a plated or even gilded throne would have,<sup>117</sup> has permitted its survival over so long a span of time.

The visible detail in the Hagia Sophia mosaic has led to discussion of the materials of which the throne might have been made; and to the conclusion that if it was not of solid metal, it would have been of metal plated over a wooden frame and studded with precious stones.<sup>118</sup> Even such a work would have substantial intrinsic value. Given the rapid changes in fortune of the Constantinopolitan treasury, need for bullion could arise time and again: in fact, Michael III is recorded as having melted down the fantastic gold ornaments and apparatus installed in the throne room by Theophilus

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–30.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 54; cf. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 10f., 38–41.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. F. Wormald, "The Throne of Solomon and St. Edward's Chair," *De artibus opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (New York, 1961), 532–39.

<sup>117</sup> A great deal of eighteenth-century French *menuiserie* was burnt during the Revolution and later for the value of its gilding; the late Mitchell Samuels once stated that virtually no original chair frames have survived.

<sup>118</sup> Whittemore, *Preliminary Report* (note 1 *supra*), 17: "If the material of its structure is not metal, it is wood overlaid with gold studded with enamels, pearls, and other precious stones. The foot-stool is only less splendid; it, too, is shown in precious metal, but it bears no adornment of gems."

—including the mechanical throne—when exigencies required.<sup>119</sup>

What I do think it reasonable to expect, however, is that when the time came to make a new throne a few years later, traditional forms, especially those invested with significant symbolic content, would have been duplicated. I do not think it unreasonable to assume that, even if specific thrones may have been replaced from time to time, a throne of curve- or lyre-backed shape persisted in use in the Sacred Palace at least from the fifth to the ninth century.

After the beginning of the Macedonian dynasty, it would seem, a different set of images was introduced, including a new throne with back curved both in the uprights *and* in the crossbar. While evoking the symbolism of the lyre-backed form, it differed sufficiently to allow its use for a single emperor (fig. 27). When accompanied by an heir, the emperor now appears on a square-backed throne, which Grierson considered a real article of palace furniture.<sup>120</sup> While this throne with square back left no certain trace in later art—although Christ is depicted on a throne with rectangular back on some eleventh-century *histamenoī*, that throne is not of the same pattern as the earlier one<sup>121</sup>—the first one, with large back curved in three dimensions, does appear in images of the enthroned Christ and Virgin, particularly in Byzantine-influenced examples in the West.<sup>122</sup>

In summary, I continue to maintain that there is evidence for the existence, first, of a basic throne type in the Byzantine Palace which featured a back with curved uprights; and, second, of successive specific examples of this type, which had a particular use in the imperial ceremonial of enthronement, in both the political and theological senses.

<sup>119</sup> *Vita Michaelis*, chap. 21, and *Vita Basillii*, chap. 29: Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn ed. (1838), 173, 257.

<sup>120</sup> *DOC Cons.*, III, 115: "...a fresh design, presumably corresponding to one of several thrones available to the sovereigns in the Palace."

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 152, 158 (Type II).

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, figs. 33–36.